

EUROPEAN TOOLS FOR MANAGING AND MONITORING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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Abstract: *One of the main objectives within the newest EU Tourism Policy regards the development of sustainable, responsible and high-quality tourism. For this purpose, the European Commission has developed during the last ten years two sets of indicators for tourist destinations, one of them being focused on the issue of high-quality tourism (QUALITEST) and the most recent one being focused on the matter of sustainable tourism development (ETIS). This paper advances the idea of designing a Business Intelligence tool, a decision support system (DSS), based on the two above-mentioned sets of indicators, which supports the efficient management of a tourist destination. Conceiving a decision support system for the management of tourist destinations, based on indicators adapted from the ETIS Toolkit and the QUALITEST manual, represents an innovative way of implementing the policies of the European Commission. The implementation and use of this kind of a Business Intelligence tool should offer effective and continuous support for destination management organizations (DMOs) in planning and managing tourist destination, thus contributing to the sustainable development of the European tourism.*

Keywords: tourist destination management, EU Policy for Tourism, sustainable development, QUALITEST, European Tourism Indicators System, Business Intelligence

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1. Introduction

The tourist destination has been defined as a specific area which is clearly delimited, from a geographic perspective, and perceived by tourists as a distinct/independent entity, having its own legal and policy framework. (Buhalis, 1999) During the last several years, the idea of comparing a tourist destination to a business/enterprise was formulated within the tourism literature and this is how the concept of destination management came out. From a marketing perspective, a tourist destination can be seen as a complex product because it sums up all tourism products that are offered within it and, still, the destination has its own distinct identity. Therefore, at present, it is generally accepted that tourism destination management is different from the management of products and services which are provided therein. (Asworth, 1990). Until the 2000s, no organization or institution involved in the whole process of choosing and visiting the tourist destination (Ritchie, 2003); it was the exclusive attribute of each tourism company or organization within the destination. This passive approach has changed since the destinations have adopted a global management perspective. And hence various bodies/entities were created to represent the interests of a tourist destination as a whole, generally called destination management organisations (DMOs). The main premise for the establishment of DMOs was the need for someone (an organization/entity) to assume the role of coordinator for all the information flows of the destination: data collection, processing, synthesis and communication, both internally and externally. (Lynch, 2004) Furthermore, it was considered that the entire development process of a tourist destination should be coordinated by a single structure. (Carter, 2004)

Since the 2000s, more and more DMOs have been created, most of them based on public-private partnerships so that the interests of all destination actors were represented. In recent years, a growing concern for DMOs is to provide a more sustainable development of tourism within destinations, which is a difficult target to achieve, mainly because of the insufficient awareness of its importance within the small and medium sized tourism enterprises. This kind of concerns are found mainly in Europe where, during the last years, there has been an emphasis on the issue of sustainable tourism development, both at policy level and at the level of achieved actions and implemented projects.

2. Sustainable development – key to competitiveness for the European tourism

In a study on the competitiveness of the EU tourism industry, recently conducted for the European Commission by several experts from ECORYS, eight so-called mega-trends that will have a significant impact on tourism and that should be taken into account in tourism planning at European level were identified. These are: globalization, demographic change, access to information, experience economy, customization, health and wellness, low cost business models and *sustainability*. (deVoldere, 2009, pp. II-III) Also, in the same study, it has been stressed that the European Union's efforts for the period 2010-2020 have to focus on actions that: support tourism demand, stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship, combine available resources more efficiently, provide oxygen to the industry and *ensure that development of tourism is sustainable*. (deVoldere, 2009, p.VII)

The relationship between the sustainable development and the competitiveness of the European tourism industry can thus be seen as one of direct determination. Tourism is based on people; it enormously depends on the employed human resources, but also on the local community members and policy makers at local level. Tourism was created for people; it exists for tourists, visitors and local community members. Therefore, tourism is an industry that considerably depends on people. But also, tourism depends on the existing natural and cultural resources within destinations. Because of these strong dependencies, tourism should develop in the right and optimal direction, through taking into account in the same time economic, social and environmental welfare; that is to develop in a sustainable way. At European level, it was stated that, due to the strong dependencies that exist between tourism and human, natural and cultural resources, the only direction in which this industry must develop in order to remain competitive is that of sustainability. (deVoldere, 2009, p.V) The sustainable development of tourism is thus considered a key element to ensuring a high level of competitiveness for this industry, in the long term, both for tourism enterprises and for tourist destinations.

Sustainable tourism is an important tool which contributes to the regeneration and economic development of European tourist destinations, particularly of the remote or sensitive areas. The sustainable development of tourism contributes to an increase in the quality of life of both host and guest communities. (Council of the European Union, 2007, p.21) Within

this context can also be included the recent concerns of the European Commission related to the creation of useful European tools to support the efficient management of tourist destinations. The difficulty of this kind of initiatives was high, due to the fact that Europe, as the sum of all tourist destinations within it, has a profound heterogeneous nature. So far, two such European tools have been designed and tested, both being based on specific indicators – the QUALITEST system and the ETIS system. The purpose of both tools is to help European tourist destinations become more competitive. Both QUALITEST and ETIS systems are complex sets of indicators that can be used by DMOs to evaluate the performance of destinations at a specific moment in time, to know where to intervene in order to monitor further progress and to compare with other destinations, if it is considered a useful action. Through the formulated indicators, both systems can contribute to the sustainable development of tourism within a tourist destination. A great advantage of both systems is their flexibility which arises from the heterogeneity of the European tourist destinations. The two systems will be briefly presented in the following sections.

3. QUALITEST – a manual for Evaluating the Quality Performance of Tourist Destinations and Services

At European level, it has been supported the idea that there is a direct association between the quality of the tourism experience offered within a tourist destination and the sustainability of the tourism industry. Thus, it was argued that, in order to ensure the sustainable development of tourism, the decision-makers of a destination should constantly monitor the quality of the tourism services and products offered within the destination and the progress that is made, this entire process being necessarily a continuous one. (European Commission, 2003, p.1) To that end, the European Commission brought a significant contribution by creating a system of indicators for quality performance evaluation which can be constantly used by a tourist destination. Thus, in 2003, the QUALITEST European Manual was published. It can also be considered a very useful tool for the sustainable development of European tourist destinations.

The authors of the Manual have conceived a Decalogue of the importance of a quality approach in tourism:

1. Quality gives the edge over competitors.

2. Quality performance makes destinations and services easier to market, both to operators and tourists.
3. A quality product results in customer loyalty.
4. Better quality means more profit.
5. Quality management leads to a stable tourism industry and protects jobs.
6. Quality improvements in a destination provide a better quality of life for local residents.
7. Quality management improves access to finance.
8. Effective monitoring of progress avoids repeating costly mistakes.
9. Careful data collection provides the tool for making the right management decisions.
10. Monitoring progress in quality improvement provides the understanding that encourages proactive management. (European Commission, 2003, p.1)

By using the QUALITEST tool, tourist destinations and the enterprises within them can be helped to maintain the quality of their offer, but it should be underlined that QUALITEST is not a guarantee of quality in itself. Constant efforts that involve all tourism actors are needed in order to provide an active quality management at destination level. The indicators included in the QUALITEST system support the DMOs to understand exactly where the destinations are positioned, regarding the quality performance. Also, because it indicates areas where there are problems, the QUALITEST system can help improve the quality performance, if actions are taken in the right fields. As the authors of the European manual claim, QUALITEST is a tool with three main goals, offering a tourist destination the chance:

1. to measure its own quality performance;
2. to benchmark its own quality performance against other tourist destination;
3. to monitor the quality performance over time. (European Commission, 2003, p.10)

It was emphasized that the QUALITEST system of indicators is an IQM (Integrated Quality Management) tool for tourist destinations which aims to achieve four key objectives:

1. tourists high level of satisfaction;
2. local tourism industry high level of satisfaction;

3. local people's higher quality of life;
4. environmental higher quality.

The indicators included in the QUALITEST system have been conceived based on the premise that all four objectives that have been mentioned above need to be achieved in a balanced way. (European Commission, 2003, p.4)

The QUALITEST tool is divided into 16 core indicators, grouped into two categories: 1). quality of destination and 2). quality of tourist product. Each core indicator consists of three sub-indicators based on the: 1). perceived quality, 2). quality management and 3). quality performance. Thus, the entire system is compound of 48 (16 x 3) indicators, as shown in Figure no 1, presented below.

Quality themes (core indicators)		Quality Perception Condition Indicators (QPCI)	Quality Management Indicators (QMI)	Quality Performance Indicators (QPI)
Quality of destination	1. Viability of local tourism industry	...	...	...
	2. Local people satisfaction	...	...	...
	3. Support to local tourism industry	...	...	...
	4. Marketing and promotion	...	...	...
	5. Siguranța și securitatea	...	...	...
	6. Ambient air quality	...	...	...
	7. Local environmental quality	...	...	...
Quality themes (core indicators)		Quality Perception Condition Indicators (QPCI)	Quality Management Indicators (QMI)	Quality Performance Indicators (QPI)
Quality of tourist product	8. Pre-arrival communication	...	...	...
	9. Accessibility	...	...	...
	10. Transport	...	...	...
	11. Accommodation	...	...	...
	12. Information	...	...	...
	13. Eating and drinking	...	...	...
	14. Activities	...	...	...
	15. Bathing water quality	...	...	...
	16. Value for money	...	...	...

Figure no 1. QUALITEST Matrix

Source: European Commission, (2003). *A Manual for Evaluating the Quality Performance of Tourist Destinations and Services*. p.8.

Each of the 48 indicators included in the QUALITEST system is very clearly explained so that it can be correctly implemented within tourist destinations. Therefore, the QUALITEST manual is a detailed and very useful tool for the evaluation, benchmarking and monitoring of the tourist destinations' quality performance at European level.

4. ETIS – a toolkit regarding the European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Destinations

It was recently stated that the use of appropriate sets of indicators should be an essential step in the planning and management of European tourist destinations. Based on the interpretation of the right indicators, DMOs can make more thorough and informed decisions, thus ensuring the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Within the newest EU Policy on Tourism, adopted by the European Commission in 2010, entitled "Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism", there is a framework of concrete actions aiming to conceive European tools to support efficient management of tourist destinations in order to develop the tourism industry in a sustainable way. (European Commission, 2010, I)

Based on joint work of the Tourism Sustainability Group (TSG) and NECSTouR, in close cooperation with the Tourism Unit of the European Commission, a call for tender was published in July 2011 for the creation of a European system of indicators for sustainable management of destinations. The implementation of the contract itself started in January 2012. (European Commission, 2010, II) The system that was created was called "European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Tourism destinations", having the acronym ETIS. In February 2013, the "European Tourism Indicator System TOOLKIT for Sustainable Destinations" was published; it is an implementation handbook, a simple and easy to apply tool, especially designed to help DMOs in the process of managing and monitoring the sustainable development of tourist destinations.

The ETIS system includes 67 indicators, grouped into four categories: 1). destination management indicators, 2). indicators related to economic value, 3). indicators related to social and cultural impact and 4). indicators related to environmental impact, as shown in Figure no 2, presented below:

	Criteria	Indicators	
		(the core indicators are in grey)	
Section A: Destination Management	A.1 Sustainable Tourism Public Policy	A.1.1	...
		A.1.1.1	...
		A.1.1.2	...
	A.2 Sustainable Tourism Management in Tourism Enterprises	A.2.1	...
		A.2.1.1	...
	A.3 Customer Satisfaction	A.3.1	...
		A.3.1.1	...
	A.4 Information and Communication	A.4.1	...
		A.4.1.1	...
	Section B: Economic Value	B.1 Tourism Flow (volume & value) at Destination	B.1.1
B.1.1.1			...
B.1.1.2			...
B.1.1.3			...
B.1.2			...
B.2 Tourism Enterprise(s) Performance		B.2.1	...
		B.2.1.1	...
		B.2.1.2	...
		B.2.2	...
B.3 Quantity and Quality of Employment		B.2.2.1	...
		B.3.1	...
		B.3.1.1	...
B.4 Safety and Health		B.3.1.2	...
		B.4.1	...
B.5 Tourism Supply Chain		B.4.1.1	...
	B.5.1	...	
	B.5.1.1	...	
	B.5.1.2	...	
Section C: Social and Cultural Impact	C.1 Community/Social Impact	C.1.1	...
		C.1.1.1	...
		C.1.1.2	...
		C.1.1.3	...
	C.2 Gender Equality	C.2.1	...
		C.2.1.1	...
		C.2.1.2	...
	C.3 Equality/Accessibility	C.3.1	...
		C.3.1.1	...
		C.3.2	...
		C.3.2.1	...
	C.4 Protecting and Enhancing Cultural Heritage, Local Identity and Assets	C.4.1	...
C.4.1.1		...	
C.4.1.2		...	

	Criteria	Indicators (the core indicators are in grey)	
Section D : Environmental Impact	D.1 Reducing Transport Impact	D.1.1	...
		D.1.1.1	...
		D.1.2	...
		D.1.2.1	...
	D.2 Climate Change	D.2.1	...
		D.2.1.1	...
		D.2.1.2	...
	D.3 Solid Waste Management	D.3.1	...
		D.3.1.1	...
		D.3.2	...
	D.4 Sewage Treatment	D.4.1	...
		D.4.1.1	...
	D.5 Water management	D.5.1	...
		D.5.1.1	...
		D.5.1.2	...
		D.5.1.3	...
	D.6 Energy Usage	D.6.1	...
		D.6.1.1	...
		D.6.1.2	...
	D.7 Landscape and Biodiversity Protection	D.7.1	...
		D.7.1.1	...
D.7.1.2		...	
D.8 Light and Noise Management	D.8.1	...	
	D.8.1.1	...	
D.9 Bathing Water Quality	D.9.1	...	
	D.9.1.1	...	

Figure no 2. ETIS Matrix

Source: European Commission, (2013). *The European Tourism Indicator System TOOLKIT for Sustainable Destinations*. pp19-21

5. Business Intelligence Solution for the management of European tourist destinations

Tourism within destinations is a dynamic and ever-changing industry, constantly facing challenges, changes, threats and opportunities. (Brătucu, G., 2002) These characteristics also determine an increased vulnerability of the tourism industry within a destination to many elements from the public policy of the state, region and/or administrative-territorial unit. Starting from these two attributes, dynamism and vulnerability, the present paper advances the idea of conceiving a Business Intelligence (BI) tool to support the performance management within a tourist destination.

Such tool, conceived as a decision support system (DSS) for DMOs, should be built on a database that is continuously updated, on a set of indicators and on a set of processing algorithms for the existing data and indicators. In order to create the appropriate set of indicators, the two above-mentioned European systems can be used. Thus, based on the specific needs and traits of a certain tourist destination, the concerned DMO can select those indicators that are most useful and would be able to provide the most solid foundation for the decision making. Furthermore, as outlined in the previous sections, both systems of indicators presented above (QUALITEST and ETIS) are flexible and adaptable, by their nature. Each concerned DMO can thus create its own set of indicators, based on which, an intelligent tool, like a DSS, would be able to regularly realize and generate those analyses and reports in order to support the planning and management of the tourist destination development.

Both systems of indicators for tourist destinations which have been presented above aim at developing sustainable and quality tourism. The indicators included in the two European tools are the synthesis and the result of several years of research at EU level, their value being thus very high. All these efforts of the European Commission can be developed in an innovative way, by creating a Business Intelligence software product based on the two systems of indicators, as a practical and useful tool for the performance management of a destination, which contributes to the sustainable development of tourism. Because the indicators included in both QUALITEST and ETIS systems were especially designed for the management of tourist destinations, a DSS based on such efficient indicators would be able to realize and generate original and comprehensive analyzes and reports showing the dynamics of the industry, thus providing the DMO

the necessary knowledge for planning, guided by the true dynamics of the industry. The implementation and use of such a BI tool would also reduce the above-mentioned vulnerability that generally characterizes the tourism industry.

The design of the decision support system for the management of a tourist destination is the task of the concerned DMO and must comply with the destination profile and also with the specific needs of the decision makers and actors within the destination. The indicators issue being successfully solved by the European Commission, the most difficult task of such approach remains the creation of an updated database. It takes a real support from several concerned institutions and bodies within a destination for the data composing the ETIS or QUALITEST indicators to be collected and updated. However, we consider that correct information campaigns, that emphasize the importance of such an approach for the wellbeing of the whole community, can determine the active involvement of more and more organizations within the destination.

The design and implementation of such decision support systems for the management of tourist destinations by the concerned DMOs can determine the achievement of another very important objective set at EU level – that is raising the awareness among European tourism enterprises about all sustainable development related issues, encouraging their involvement, especially the small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), in the development of sustainable and quality European tourism. It has recently been emphasized the key role that small and medium sized enterprises play in the process of developing the tourism in a sustainable way. (Council of the European Union, 2007, p.22) SMEs can be directly involved by the DMO in the implementation of a DSS for the destination management, by providing them direct benefits, such as access to various reports and analyzes which can be useful in their decision making also.

6. Conclusions

Designing a decision support system (DSS) for the management of tourist destinations, based on the two European systems of indicators (QUALITEST and ETIS), is an innovative way to implement the policies of the European Commission. The use of such Business Intelligence tool would offer real and constant support to European DMOs in the process of planning and managing the tourist destinations. The performance

management of destinations, which also means that tourism is developed in a sustainable way, provides a long term competitive advantage for the tourism industry, the entire community benefiting from it, because it is generally accepted that tourism is an important trigger for progress in other economic sectors. In conclusion, the approach presented in this paper covers two of the four main priorities within the latest EU Tourism Policy: 1). Stimulate competitiveness in the European tourism sector through innovation and 2). Promote the development of sustainable, responsible and high-quality tourism, by proposing an innovative way to implement the two European tools - QUALITEST and ETIS.

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